

OF FUTURIST MUSIC AND DANCING

How the "Glorification of Noise" Theory of Marinetti Worked out in a Concert in Milan—The "Groaner," the "Snorter" and the "Gurglers" as Substitutes for Usual Orchestral Instruments—Mme. de Saint-Point Demonstrates Her Ideas of Futurist Dancing Before a Bewildered Audience in Paris

BY ESTHER SWAINSON

THE young Italian rebels, led by the famous Marinetti, who advocates that all the antiquities of Florence should be thrown into the Arno, have now turned their attention to music. Having attacked all the other arts, painting, sculpture, the drama and poetry, it was only to be expected that they would shortly turn their attention to music. The first indication of the coming storm was in 1911 when Pratella issued his manifesto to futurist musicians. He wrote a comparatively moderate appeal to musicians to forsake the old and pursue the new. He urged that all conservatories of music should be abolished, that all music publishers should be tabooed, that the exhumation and revival of old operas and the music of bygone times should from henceforth be regarded as a criminal offense. He alluded to Puccini and Giordano as "paste-board dummies." He implored that no one should be discouraged by opposition. He declared that the path to glory lay onwards through a hooting mob; the mob that in succeeding generations had hissed the works of Palestrina, Bach, Beethoven, Wagner and Debussy.

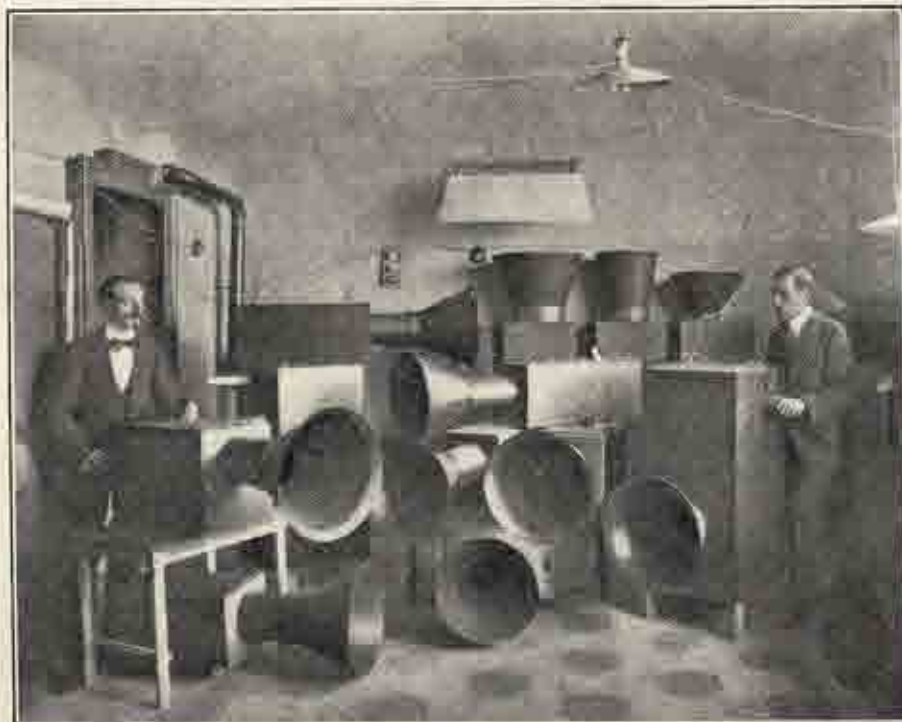
He urged that futurist musicians seek inspiration in "the song of the great multitudes furious with work, pleasure or revolt; in the many colored and polyphonic assaults of revolution in modern capitals; in modern railroad stations; those ravenous swallows of fire-breathing serpents; in modern factories, hung by their chains of smoke to the clouds."

This manifesto was followed by the first concert of futurist music, given on March 9, 1913, in Rome at the Costanzi Theater. The séance must have been a stormy one, for the futurists describe it as "a bloody battle, where they gained the victory, in the face of an opposing force that numbered 4000 Philistines." But this first concert was but child's play when compared with more recent developments.

Glorification of Noise

From this first tentative effort of futurist musicians, Russolo the painter, evolved a yet more daring project—that of admitting all "noise" sounds (sounds that are considered to be unmusical) into the domain of music. Russolo issued his manifesto in the Spring of 1913. He tells us that the ancient world was a world of silence and that only in the nineteenth century, with the invention of machinery, was "noise" born. He says that to-day is the era of *Noise* and that it dominates all the sensibilities of men. His propaganda is *The Glorifica-*

tion of Noise. He points out to us that the world of all preceding generations was a very quiet world and that even nature goes her way but quietly. He



Noise Orchestra and Noise Instruments of the Futurists—On the Left: M. Russolo Working the "Groaner." On the Right: M. Piattie, Performing on the "Gurgler"

admits that she has her moments of tumult and revolt, for he speaks of hurricanes, thunderstorms, avalanches, but he contends that her normal condition is one of comparative silence. To this silence he attributes the wonderment and delight that man felt when he first blew into a hollow reed and produced a sound, or strung his bow and touching the string, found that it produced a note. He then traces the history of music, explaining to us that the evolution of music has been nothing more nor less than the slow admission of so-called "noise" sounds into the domain of music. He defines us to state the exact boundary line where music ends and noise begins.

Lully was the man of noise in the seventeenth century—he is peace, perfect peace to-day. Mozart was the man of noise of the eighteenth century, he is the spirit of harmony to-day. Russolo points out to us, and with perfect truth, that no eighteenth century ear could have tolerated the dissonances that are considered to be perfectly admissible in our music of to-day. He foresees the time

when all noise will have become music. He complains that our modern orchestra is a painfully limited affair, consisting, as it does, of instruments that are capable of producing only five different qualities of sound—stringed instruments that are either bowed or plucked, brass and wood wind and instruments of percussion. He thinks we must in our secret hearts be tired of these and that composers must surely be weary of seeking the new combinations of sound that may be drawn from so limited a choice of instruments. He urges us to open our ears to the music that the modern world of noise is playing to us. He speaks of the beauty of these "noise sounds." He suggests how they may be co-ordinated and applied to produce a new type of music, a music that will be

typical of the twentieth century, and of the advent of the futurists.

The Milan Concert

The manifesto was followed by a concert given August 11 at Milan. Four pieces were played on the new noise-making instruments. The program was as follows:

"The Awakening of the Capital," "Rendezvous of Autos and Aeroplanes," "Dinner on the Terrace of the Casino," and "Skirmish in the Oasis."

The instruments that took part comprised: Three groaners, two exploders, one thunderer, three whistlers, two rustlers, two gurglers, one shatterer, one scraper, one snorter.

As a footnote to the account of this remarkable concert we may read that in spite of the inexperience of some of the executants the ensemble playing was almost perfect throughout, and that the public was not only impressed but delighted by the beauty of the sounds that the noisicians produced.

"Dances Idéistes"

Also we have been having some futurist dancing.

Valentine de Saint-Point, artist, poetess, dramatist, queen of the French futurists and grand-niece of the poet Lamartine, has just given us an afternoon pregnant with new sensations. To her dances she gives the name "Dances Idéistes." The art that is produced when music, poetry and the dance are combined, she calls "Métachorie."

In a short opening lecture, she explained to us that her dances were neither physical nor voluptuous, but wholly and entirely cerebral, that they spring from an idea or thought (hence the name), that she makes no effort to express either the rhythm of the music, or the letter of the poem that she is interpreting, but that she seeks the spirit that inspired both music and poem and interprets it in another form of art.

This type of dancing she believes to be the dancing of the future. She condemns utterly the use of dance steps or dance forms of the past in conjunction with modern music, and she alluded a little scathingly to Isadora Duncan and her application of Greek dances to the music of Chopin or Beethoven.

A Geometrical Basis

She then told us that her dances are based on geometrical forms, since geometry, the science of line, is the essence of plastic art, but she hinted that all those

who care to look below the surface may find an inner and occult meaning in all geometrical designs. Gracefully she informed us that she would not dance nude, since though the human form is beautiful in repose, it is much enhanced by flowing draperies when in movement, and that her face would be veiled but only in order that a detail might not distract our attention from the contour of the whole line of expression.

Then—the curtain went up on a pitch black stage, two huge incense burners began to fume, a glowing geometrical design appeared, and the well-known resonant voice of De Max began to recite one of her love poems. When the poem was finished the emblem vanished, the music began (a not very interesting or ultra-modern composition by Roland-Manuel), the stage flooded with purple light, and Valentine de Saint-Point was discovered, dressed in a green petticoat, sitting cross-legged in the middle of the stage, ready to express in plastic form the spirit that had inspired her poem. The program comprised: Three love poems produced in this way, three atmospheric poems, danced to the music of Debussy and Erik Satie, author of "Flabby Preludes to a House Dog," whose last composition "Dried Embryos" produced so profound an impression when played by Jane Mortier at her recent recital at the Salle Pleyel, and finally three Poems of War, danced in a flood of red light to the music of Maurice Maeterlinck, by Mme. de Saint-Point in a warrior dress of chain armour and a helm crowned by flowing plumes of monstrous length.

The Audience Bewildered

And what impression did all this make?

First there was a wild revolt against the burning incense, the whole audience sneezed and coughed until a hurried attendant extinguished the fumes. Then—there was a little clapping after each dance, but scarcely more than politeness demanded. The pulse of the audience expressed sheer bewilderment. From their attitude one realized that they had come expecting to be amused, and that they had already indulged in many a hearty laugh at the expense of the music of the future, the futurist poets, and the futurist painters and sculptors. They were baffled and balked—I think they had come anticipating a good laugh at the futurist dancing.

But Valentine de Saint-Point was too simple and too beautiful to be laughed at—her effort was too sincere to be mocked and yet her performance was not entirely convincing. During certain moments of her dance, she touched something that was wholly beautiful and wholly new, at other moments she seemed to lose the thread of her inspiration and to dwindle into something that was almost childishly ineffective and inexpressive. But she was introducing her new ideas of the dance in public for the first time—and to create and perfect something new is a supremely difficult task. To criticise a new effort amounts almost to impertinence, for it is dismissing the result of months and even years of patient thought and experiment in one brief hour. So what I have said is not criticism, it is only the description of what I saw and how it impressed me, and I would like to add that it would give me great pleasure to see some more futurist dances in the near future. Methinks that they were born just one month too soon.

PARIS, December 20, 1913.

Moussorgski's "Boris Godounoff" has now been given in Budapest for the first time with great success.

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